

Government Orders

Consultation means more than the right of simply being heard either before or after the fact. Consultation must mean the right of the people of Canada to scrutinize and have input into specific constitutional proposals whenever they are presented by the government.

True consultation, true public participation, must be based on the notion that constitutional proposals by governments are not carved in stone. They can be altered. They can be changed as a direct consequence of public input.

We do welcome the process announced today by the Prime Minister. We see an important opportunity for public dialogue. We see an opportunity to foster understanding and consensus in the country. We also see some danger. This process is and can be only a first step. It must be followed by an open constitutional process. Once new and specific constitutional proposals are formulated by the federal government, that government must go back to the people of Canada again. It will not be acceptable for it to say to Canadians: "You have had your chance to be heard in the winter and spring of 1990 and now we, the federal government, are going back behind closed doors again."

Mr. Speaker, the days of "my way, or no way," are over.

Some hon. members: Right on.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Gray (Windsor West): Mr. Speaker, it is no longer acceptable in this country to settle for a consensus of 11 men meeting in secret after the citizens' forum announced by the Prime Minister has reported.

True consensus, national consensus, will only be found in and through the hearts, minds and souls of Canadians. Let us recognize in this the autumn of our discontent that we must not fail again.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Ms. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to address some remarks today in response to the Prime Minister and to say that I think that finally an initiative has begun which will begin the dialogue in Canada.

[*Translation*]

Let me say first of all that I support all initiatives related to Canada's future. It is time to initiate a dialogue. With Meech Lake, Canadians lived through the most traumatic experiences ever seen in this country's recent history.

[*English*]

The Prime Minister said today that he wants to open up the constitutional process and implies that he is prepared to change the old style politics of behind closed doors decision-making.

[*Translation*]

I welcome these statements but, once again, I fear that the Prime Minister's rhetoric may not reflect his actions. He had four months to decide who to appoint to the Commission and to consult with various groups. He had four months to allow these groups to elect representatives who might have become members of the Commission.

[*English*]

There was an opportunity, Mr. Speaker. I think, if I may make reference to the commission itself, it has a good representation. My quarrel is not with the individuals who are on that commission, but the Prime Minister had an opportunity to fundamentally change the system in terms of opening up the process.

Let me give you a couple of examples, Mr. Speaker. Surely a commission like this should have been above partisan concerns, and I am not suggesting that the people who are appointed were necessarily partisan appointments. But the process could have changed if the Prime Minister had perhaps consulted—at least he did not consult me as leader of the New Democratic Party—about the kind of commission, about the terms of reference, that we as a party would like to see. That would have been a fundamental change in the old style of politics.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Ms. McLaughlin: There is another way that the Prime Minister could have changed the old system fundamentally by saying to different groups in our society: "Could you elect, or could you nominate persons to represent your particular interest—business, labour, aboriginal people".